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This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 001975

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE (MENNUTI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2012

TAGS: PREL, PGOV, VE, VT

SUBJECT: ENGAGING CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VENEZUELA

REF: STATE: 73097

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON, REASON E.O. 12958 1.5 (B,D)

1. (C) PER REFTTEL, AMBASSADOR MET WITH VATICAN FM EQUIVALENT ARCHBISHOP JEAN LOUIS TAURAN EVENING OF APRIL 19 TO URGE THE HOLY SEE TO TAKE AN ACTIVE AND APPROPRIATE ROLE IN SUPPORT OF VENEZUELAN DEMOCRACY. TAURAN WAS WELL BRIEFED ON THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA. AS USUAL, HE REFERRED TO THE POPE'S STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION (PROMOTING RECONCILIATION AND
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PEACE), GIVEN AT THE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17 GENERAL AUDIENCE. HE WAS GUARDEDLY POSITIVE ON THE CHURCH TALKING A PLACE IN PRESIDENT CHAVEZ' "NATIONAL DIALOGUE," BUT SAID THAT THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH VIS A VIS CHAVEZ WAS UNCERTAIN, GIVEN THE LATTER'S HISTORICAL HOSTILITY TO THE CHURCH. AMBASSADOR AGREED, RECALLING THAT CHAVEZ HAD CALLED THE CHURCH "A CANCER" ON THE VENEZUELAN BODY POLITIC JUST A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO.

2. (C) TAURAN SAID THE CHURCH HAD TO BE CAREFUL, THAT EVEN THOUGH TIME WAS SHORT, THEY WOULD TAKE A LOW PROFILE UNTIL THE EARLY POST-COUP PERIOD PLAYS OUT. HE SAID CHAVEZ IS TALKING RECONCILIATION NOW BUT, TAURAN AVERRED, CHAVEZ WAS NOT AT ALL TRUSTWORTHY. THE HOLY SEE FEARS A NEGATIVE REACTION TO THE FACT THAT THE CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF CARACAS, VELASCO GARCIA, HAD SIGNED A DOCUMENT AT THE SATURDAY INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENTIAL USURPER CARMONA.

3. (C) TAURAN COUNSELED THE USG TO "PRESSURE" THE MILITARY AND BUSINESS CLASSES IN VENEZUELA TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION NOW THAT CHAVEZ WAS BACK IN POWER. HE SPECULATED THAT SOME GENERALS WHO HAD SUPPORTED THE COUP, HAVING SEEN THAT A CARMONA PRESIDENCY LOOKED LIKE IT WOULD INVESTIGATE CORRUPTION SCANDALS IN VENEZUELA, DECIDED THAT PERHAPS CHAVEZ WAS THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS. TAURAN DECRIED THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF "THOSE 15 CUBAN ADVISORS" AND RECALLED THAT WHEN THE POPE MET FIDEL CASTRO IN 1998, FIDEL HAD SAID THERE WAS A YOUNG NEW LEADER ON THE SCENE, CALLING CHAVEZ "SPLENDID." TAURAN CLOSED BY ASSURING US THAT HE WOULD SPEAK TO HIS NUNCIO OVER THE WEEKEND, AND WOULD STAY IN CLOSE TOUCH AS WE GO FORWARD.

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